

THE SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FORCED MIGRATION

A Multi-Media Educational Tool

Winter 2021

Food and Migration: Community, Diaspora, Politics

Target audience: late elementary and middle school (grades 5-8)

Keywords: activism, diaspora, food, home

Research by Naima Nader (Vassar College)

“A seed is a time capsule” -Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik

My hope is that after reading through this collection of resources you will see the vital link between food and community—how food forms an integral part of identity and ties people to their origins. In her TED talk Dr. Alison Alkon talks about food as “radical empathy,” a term borrowed from author Isabel Wilkerson. She explains that food has a tremendous potential to bring people together. This is what I establish in the first section—you will read about people like the “Seed Lady” of Watts, Anna-Marie Carter, who brought healthy food to a toxic environment, giving people lifestyle alternatives. Similarly, the People’s Kitchen Collective (PKC) brings people together with their community meals, such as their annual free breakfasts inspired by the Black Panther Party Free Breakfast Program. People like Anna-Marie Carter and the PKC understand that food is at the heart of culture. For many, their first introduction to a new culture is through food—therefore food can be a means through which we understand others and their experiences.

This is why in the second section I share stories that help us understand the migration process through the culinary lens with accounts from Domee Shi and Jhumpa Lahiri, among others. The show Taste the Nation is a fantastic example of sharing the stories of migrant communities through food. Padma Lakshmi visits various immigrant communities in the United States to get to know their food, but in doing so tells a far greater story of people and their communities.

Finally, in order to show that issues relating to food have a real-world impact, in the third section I share current political battles happening through food that will impact the futures of migrants in various places. These include the H-2A guestworker

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program for migrant farmworkers in the United States, the discrimination that Chinese restaurants have been facing during the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, and the debate surrounding pork-free lunch options, secularism, and intolerance in France. As you read through the section, reflect on how these topics relate to you and to where you live.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH FOOD



Image: [People's Kitchen Collective](#), Free Breakfast Program at Life is Living, inspired by the Black Panther Party for Self Defense and their Survival Programs (2018)

Before you start:

- What does food mean to you? Describe one sense (smell, taste, touch, etc.) that you associate with one of your favorite foods. Try using this description to tell a story about your relationship with food.
- Is there a dish that has a particular significance to you and your family? Are there any recipes that have been in your family for generations?
- With whom do you usually eat? Where do you sit? What utensils do you use? Do you have any rituals around food? (ex: birthday cake, turkey for thanksgiving, matzo ball soup for passover...)

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Starting off with Dr. Alison Alkon's brilliant TED talk "Food as Radical Empathy," uses these sources to understand how food might help us relate to each other and understand each other's experiences.

Watch: [Food as Radical Empathy | Alison Alkon | TEDxEmory \(2018\), TEDx Talks \(video\)](#)

- Write down three things you learned from Dr. Alkon's talk. How do you interpret her idea of food as "radical empathy"?

Read: [Anna-Marie Carter, "Seeds of Justice, Seeds of Hope," YES! Magazine, April 1, 2003](#)

- "In the midst of the toxic atmosphere of Watts, seeds are sprouting, organic gardens are thriving, young people are discovering a vocation, and healthy, whole foods are becoming part of everyday life."
- What do you think of Anna-Marie Carter's project? Can it be recreated elsewhere? Other than healthy food, what did her initiative bring to Watts?

Watch: [The Food Historian: Educator Uses Food to Tell Migration Stories | The Regulars \(2020\), San Francisco Chronicle \(video\)](#)

- **Explore:** [People's Kitchen Collective \(PKC\)](#)
- Look through PKC's website, what is one thing you found interesting? Share something you learned from the video.

Read: ["Identity in Diaspora," Facing History and Ourselves](#)

- This is an excerpt from Saira Shah's, *The Storyteller's Daughter: One Woman's Return to Her Lost Homeland* (2003) — with discussion questions
- "Stories are like these onions—like dried experience. They aren't the original experience but they are more than nothing at all. You think about a story, you turn it over in your mind, and it becomes something else."
- Respond to the discussion questions at the end of the reading.

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UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION THROUGH FOOD



Image: Still from Pixar short film [Bao](#), (2018), directed by Domee Shi

Watch: [Taste the Nation with Padma Lakshmi](#)

- “From indigenous communities to recent immigrant arrivals, Padma breaks bread with Americans across the nation to uncover the roots and relationship between our food, our humanity and our history – ultimately revealing stories that challenge notions of identity, belonging, and what it means to be American.”
- Choose one episode to watch. What did you learn about the people represented? How do they preserve their culture?

Read: [Jhumpa Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s,” in *Interpreter of Maladies* \(1999\)](#)

- “Whenever there is [...] a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.”
- Why do you think Mrs. Sen takes such care in her cooking, and in buying fresh fish?

Watch: [Bao, Domee Shi \(2018\)](#)

- “This short film from Pixar Animation Studios and director Domee Shi explores the ups and downs of the parent-child relationship through the colorful, rich, and tasty lens of the Chinese immigrant community in Canada.”

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- **Read:** [Kaly Soto, “The Creator of ‘Bao’ on That Twist: ‘Part of Me Wanted to Shock Audiences,’”](#) *New York Times*, July 27, 2018
- **Read:** [Petra Radulovic, “The polarized reactions to Pixar’s ‘Bao’ are rooted in culture,”](#) *Polygon*, December 18, 2018
- Were you surprised by the ending? Did your opinion change after reading the two articles? What did you learn from this?

POLITICAL BATTLES THROUGH FOOD/WAYS TO GET INVOLVED



Image: [Farmworker Justice](#) (2021)

Skim these sources on labor rights for migrant farmworkers:

- [Jessica Kurn, “Immigration and the Food System,”](#) *Farm Aid*, August 24, 2018
- [Miriam Jordan, “Farmworkers, Mostly Undocumented, Become ‘Essential’ During Pandemic,”](#) *New York Times*, April 2, 2020
- [H-2A Guestworker Program,](#) *Farmworker Justice* (2021)
- [“Biden’s Labor Department withdraws Trump administration’s final rule on H-2A guest worker program,”](#) *Farmworker Justice*, January 21, 2021
 - For a more in-depth analysis: [No Way to Treat a Guest: Why the H-2A Agricultural Visa Program Fails U.S. and Foreign Workers](#) (report), 2012

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What are some challenges migrant farm workers face in the United States? After reading the New York Times article, what do you think of how the US values agricultural work?

Vocab— The H-2A visa program allows foreign workers to do temporary farm work in the US

Read about these two campaigns to support businesses and restaurants suffering from xenophobia during the pandemic:

- Grace Young, [Coronavirus: Chinatown Stories](#), Posterhouse
 - “Building on the ‘Coronavirus: Chinatown Stories’ video series, Poster House is starting a campaign to express our love for Chinese cuisine in order to combat xenophobia. We encourage the public to use #ChinatownStories on Instagram to post memories and photos of your Chinatown, your favorite Chinese restaurants and food shops or stores, and how they’re faring under COVID as a way of showing moral support.”
- Jessie Yeung, [“Chinese restaurants are losing business over coronavirus fears. An Australian social media campaign wants to change that,”](#) CNN, February 18, 2020
- Do you think these kinds of social media campaigns are effective? Think about the restaurants where you live, do any face similar challenges?

Vocab— Xenophobia: fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners

Read about the debate over pork-free lunches in French school cafeterias

- Angelique Chrisafis, [“Pork or nothing: how school dinners are dividing France,”](#) *The Guardian*, October 13, 2015
 - “The battle over national identity is being played out on children’s lunch plates. Is scrapping a pork-free option a victory for secularism – or just an example of religious intolerance?”
 - After reading the article from *The Guardian*, why do you think this debate about school lunches is so big? Can you think of any similar questions arising in your schools– for example halal or kosher food options.

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- [“Proposer des menus sans porc à la cantine ne contrevient pas à la laïcité, juge le Conseil d’Etat,” *Le Monde*, December 11, 2020](#)
 - *Source is in French, and describes how the French Conseil d’Etat (Council of State: highest administrative court) ruled that pork-free options are not contradictory to secularism. However, Chalon-sur-Saône (the city where the debate was sparked) will not re-establish the pork-free option in its school cafeterias.

Closing questions:

- What are the three most important ideas you learned?
- Has there been a change in the way you think about food?
- After having read through these stories, what are ways we can turn the idea of food as radical empathy into action?